



## **DROUGHT RESPONSE STAGE 2 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Why are we in Stage 2 now?**

Austin's Drought Contingency Plan states that the City Manager may consider water use restrictions in response to changes in water supply or demand. The supply trigger for Stage 2 is a combined storage level of less than 900,000 acre-feet in lakes Travis and Buchanan. Because the lakes were expected to reach that level and no significant rainfall was forecasted, the City Manager announced on August 30, 2012, that he would implement Stage 2 effective September 4, 2012.

### **Do I follow the same restrictions as the last time we were in Stage 2?**

No. The Austin City Council adopted a revised Water Conservation Code on August 16, 2012, with different Stage 2 restrictions, including changes to watering days and times.

### **What is the Water Conservation Code and why was it changed?**

The Water Conservation Code (Chapter 6-4 of City Code) helps conserve treated drinking water by outlining the restrictions that the City of Austin may implement in response to supply and demand triggers or emergency conditions. During the summer of 2011, Austin lost a massive amount of tree canopy due to the exceptional drought. If conditions had continued to worsen and additional conservation measures had become necessary, the code in place at that time would have largely prohibited outdoor water use, placing a significant burden on Austin Water's customers and further threatening the tree canopy and other vegetation. Austin City Council directed Austin Water to revise the code to better address response to extended drought conditions.

### **Did the public have a chance to provide input on the Water Conservation Code changes?**

Austin Water held four public workshops between December 2011 and March 2012 to get input from customers about how water use should be regulated during droughts; where the triggers for implementing drought stages should be set; and which conservation measures should be put in place for each stage. Members of neighborhood organizations and various interest groups were encouraged to attend. Meeting documents and presentations were available online and people unable to attend the meetings were encouraged to submit comments about proposed changes.

## **Watering Day/Time Questions**

### **What is my watering day?**

The outdoor watering schedule is determined by street address, property type, and type of irrigation used. Under the current Water Conservation Code, irrigation is permitted as listed below:

- **Monday**  
Public schools
- **Tuesday**  
Commercial/Multi-family customers-- using either an automatic irrigation system or hose-end irrigation-- with street addresses that end in an even number
- **Wednesday**  
Residential customers-- using an automatic irrigation system-- with street addresses that end in an odd number

- **Thursday**  
Residential customers-- using an automatic irrigation system-- with street addresses that end in an even number
- **Friday**  
Commercial/Multi-family customers-- using either an automatic irrigation system or hose-end irrigation-- with street addresses that end in an odd number
- **Saturday**  
Residential customers-- using hose-end irrigation--with street addresses that end in an odd number
- **Sunday**  
Residential customers-- using hose-end irrigation-- with street addresses that end in an even number

### **What times can I operate my automatic irrigation system?**

You may schedule your system to run from 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. and/or from 7:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. on your assigned water use day. This also applies to the manual operation of an automatic sprinkler system.

### **How should I change my irrigation system's programming for once a week watering?**

After reducing the programming to one day, increase the number of minutes by 20-50% to allow for deeper watering. But be aware that watering start times may need to be adjusted so that irrigation is completed irrigation by 5:00 a.m. Also, be aware that this increase could result in water runoff. If that is the case, utilize the additional starting times on the controller and run 2 or 3 cycles with fewer minutes or until no runoff occurs.

#### ***Example:***

If you were watering 10 minutes on a station twice per week during Stage 1, you would now water 12 to 15 minutes for that station on your Stage 2 watering day. If 12 minutes results in excess water running off the landscape, then you would need to run two 6-minute cycles about 1 to 2 hours apart.

### **When may I water with a hose-end sprinkler?**

You may water with a hose-end sprinkler from 12 a.m. to 10 a.m. and/or from 7 p.m. to 12 a.m. on your assigned outdoor water use day.

### **When may I water with a soaker hose or soaker tape?**

When irrigating vegetable gardens or trees, you may water with a soaker hose or soaker tape at any time on any day. For tree watering, the soaker hose must be placed within the drip line of the tree. All other uses of a soaker hose or soaker tape must be conducted within the hose-end sprinkler times of 12 a.m. to 10 a.m. and/or from 7 p.m. to 12 a.m. on your assigned outdoor water use day.

### **When may I water using drip irrigation?**

You may water using drip irrigation any day at any time. If your drip irrigation system is part of an automatic sprinkler system you must turn off the spray head zones.

### **What does the City of Austin consider drip irrigation?**

Austin Water regulations allow for drip irrigation products that apply water at the surface or subsurface. Such products include drip tubing at or below the surface or covered by mulch, drippers on drip distribution tubing or on ¼" tubing off the distribution tubing and pinned to the ground. Items not included in the drip exemption are soaker hoses, soaker tape, any type of bubbler, spider/stream dripper, microspray, fogger, or other emitter creating an aerial emission of water. Soaker hoses and soaker tape are allowed at any time for use in vegetable gardens or when placed within the drip line of a tree canopy.

Bubblers can be used to water trees within the drip line of the tree at any time. Microsprays on an automatic irrigation system can be used on the property's watering day between the times of 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. and/or from 7:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.

### **What about watering with a hand-held hose?**

You may water with a hand-held hose or refillable container at any time of day and on any day of the week. Refillable containers include buckets, Treegators® and other similar watering vessels.

### **Are schools on a separate watering schedule from other commercial properties?**

- Public schools can water on Mondays from 12 a.m. to 5 a.m. and/or from 7:00 p.m. to 12 a.m.
- Private schools follow the commercial watering schedule. Odd-numbered addresses should water on Friday and even-numbered addresses should water on Tuesday.
- Addresses are determined by the address of the water utility service account.
- Athletic field irrigation is exempt and can occur at any time on any day.

### **I live in a condo. What is my watering day under Stage 2?**

Individual owner-operated condo sprinkler systems are treated as residential properties and follow the residential watering schedule. Individual watering days are determined by the number of the condo.

If using an automatic irrigation system:

- Odd-numbered condos water on Wednesday. Even-numbered condos water on Thursday.

If using a hose-end sprinkler:

- Odd-numbered condos water on Saturday. Even-numbered condos water on Sunday.

Irrigation systems in common areas, operated by the property management, follow the commercial watering schedule. Addresses are determined by the address of the water utility service account.

- Odd-numbered addresses water on Friday and even-numbered addresses water on Tuesday.

### **I live in a mobile home park. When do I water under Stage 2?**

Individually-operated sprinklers should water by the street address or unit number of the mobile home.

If using an automatic irrigation system:

- Odd-numbered units water on Wednesday. Even-numbered units water on Thursday.

If using a hose-end sprinkler:

- Odd-numbered units water on Saturday. Even-numbered units water on Sunday.

Common areas maintained by the park management should follow the commercial property watering schedule. Addresses are determined by the address of the water utility service account.

- Odd-numbered addresses should water on Friday and even-numbered addresses should water on Tuesday.

### **What about carriage house or garage apartments marked with a “half” address, or duplexes?**

Since these properties are typically on the same side as the “main” house, water according to that number. For example, 2025 ½ Elm Street would water with odd-numbered addresses.

### **When can the residents of my four-plex water?**

Properties with four or fewer units should water according to the residential schedule. Each unit will have the same watering day based on the property's street address (not unit number). Properties with five or more units should water on the commercial/multi-family schedule.

## **Water Waste**

### **What is water waste?**

Water waste is defined as:

- failure to repair a controllable leak, including but not limited to a broken sprinkler head, a broken pipe, or a leaking valve; or
- operating an irrigation system with:
  - (a) a broken head; or
  - (b) a head that is out of adjustment and the arc of the spray head is over a street, parking area, or other impervious surface; or
  - (c) a head that is misting because of high water pressure; or
- allowing water flow during irrigation that:
  - (a) runs, flows, or streams in a way that extends into a street, parking area, or other impervious surface for a distance of 50 feet or greater; or
  - (b) ponds to a depth greater than 0.25 inch in a street, parking area, or other impervious surface.

### **How can I prevent water waste?**

Water waste can be caused by anything from a poorly maintained irrigation system to topography. Homeowners are responsible for preventing water waste on their property. To help prevent water waste:

- Inspect and maintain your irrigation system to repair leaks, replace broken sprinkler heads, adjust misaligned heads, and reduce misting.
- Know your controller. Make sure watering times are appropriate to reduce overwatering/runoff.
- Incorporate the topography of your property into the design of your landscape.

### **What if my property is located on a slope?**

If you have a problem with runoff because your property is located on a slope, talk to your landscaper or irrigator about ways to reduce the amount of water flowing from your property.

### **Will I be fined if runoff from someone else's property comes onto mine?**

No. Only the property where the runoff originates will be in violation.

### **What if my sprinkler heads are misting because my water pressure is high?**

One way to prevent misting is to have a licensed irrigator install a Pressure Reduction Valve (PRV) on your system. Austin Water offers rebates for PRV installation. You can find more information about the rebate [here](#).

### **Can I use an auxiliary water source to water my yard?**

The Water Conservation Code does not apply to auxiliary sources of water. It should be noted that auxiliary water cannot leave the property using it, so steps should be taken to prevent runoff and misting.

## **Enforcement of Water Use Restrictions:**

### **Who is required to follow Stage 2?**

All customers who use water, other than reclaimed water, supplied by Austin Water must follow Stage 2. If your water does not come from Austin Water, check with your water provider for restrictions in your area. If you have a well and use groundwater, you should check with the local groundwater conservation district for your area. If you take water directly from the Highland Lakes, you should contact LCRA at (512) 473-3231.

### **What if I am a Travis County resident who lives in the Austin Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) and receives water service from Austin Water?**

If you receive water from Austin Water, you are required to follow Stage 2. The Austin City Code and the Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 551, Water Control by Municipalities, Section 401.006, Water Conservation by Home-Rule, gives the City enforcement authority in its ETJ.

**How do I report a watering violation?**

You may either call Austin 3-1-1 or complete an [online report](#). When reporting a violation, please provide the address, time, date, and type of violation. Additional information such as a business name or specific location on the property is also helpful.

**How can I follow up on my watering violation reports?**

To check the status of a report you submitted online, go to the [Check Service Request Status](#) webpage, enter in the Service Request Number and your email address. If you called 3-1-1 to report a violation, you can call again to follow up.

**Do you really enforce the water restrictions?**

Yes. While many of our efforts focus on customer education, the Water Conservation Code authorizes us to enforce the water use regulations. Violations witnessed by City staff will first result in issuance of an Official Warning postcard. The Official Warning postcard contains educational information about the outdoor watering schedule and other water use restrictions. Future violations of any type which are witnessed by City staff will result in the assessment of fines to the customer's utility bill.

**What are the potential consequences of a watering schedule violation?**

Currently, a violation is subject to an administrative fine. Fines vary depending on the stage of drought and increase with each occurrence of a violation. During Stage 2, residential fines start at \$75 per violation and commercial fines begin at \$200 per violation. For information about the entire fine matrix, please see [Rule R161-13.17](#).

**What does it mean if I receive a Report of Violation postcard in the mail?**

A Report of Violation postcard indicates that your address was reported for water waste. It is simply a courtesy notice from Austin Water and a reminder for you to make sure your irrigation system complies with the Water Conservation Code. It does not mean that a violation has been charged against you.

**What do I do if I am certain that I received a Report of Violation postcard in error?**

If you believe you received a postcard erroneously—for example, you do not even have an irrigation system—you can simply disregard it. It is not necessary to call our office, though we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**I've reported a violation several times. Why hasn't there been a fine?**

We are typically unable to respond immediately to 3-1-1 reports but we use the reported information to schedule investigations at times when we are likely to observe violations occurring and to prioritize patrols by neighborhood. Patrols and investigations are scheduled around the clock; however, a staff member must witness and document the violation before a fine can be issued.

**Vehicle Washing****I need to wash my vehicle. Can I wash it in my driveway or yard?**

No. Vehicles must be washed at a car wash facility. Home car washing is not allowed, even on your watering day. The standard hose and spray nozzle method for washing vehicles at home uses approximately three times more potable water than the typical deluxe wash at a car wash facility.

**My organization wants to hold a charity car wash. Can we do that during Stage 2?**

No, charity car washes are not allowed during Stage 2.

## **Pressure Washing**

### **What is “Cosmetic Power/Pressure Washing”?**

Commercial cosmetic power/pressure washing means treatment or cleaning of a surface with specialized equipment that uses directed water for the cosmetic cleaning of buildings, vehicles and other mobile equipment, or outdoor surfaces. It does not include industrial cleaning, cleaning associated with manufacturing activities, hazardous or toxic waste cleaning, or cleaning necessary to remove graffiti.

### **Can I use a pressure washer to clean my sidewalk/driveway/deck/patio/other paved area? What about the siding on my house/fence/other unpaved surface?**

During Stage 2, pressure washing times, days or purposes are not limited. You may use a pressure washer to clean these items.

### **I am a professional pressure washer. What restrictions are there in Stage 2?**

All professional pressure washers, including mobile vehicle washing businesses, must use a recycling unit and a spray nozzle having a working trigger shut-off and a protective weep that uses no more than 3.5 gallons per minute. Having a recycling unit reduces the amount of potable water used and also the potential for pollutant-loaded discharge to enter the watershed.

## **Fountains**

### **What is an ornamental fountain?**

An ornamental fountain is a man-made structure with a jet, stream, or flow of water that is not intended to support aquatic life. Aquatic life includes any fish or other vertebrate organism that requires oxygen in the water to survive.

### **May I operate my ornamental fountain?**

During Stage 2, the Water Conservation Code allows only recirculating fountains that do not have an aerial emission or fall of water greater than four (4) inches to operate. Limiting the aerial emission and fall of water reduces the amount lost to evaporation. All other fountains should be turned off unless necessary to sustain aquatic life.

### **What is a recirculating fountain?**

A recirculating fountain cycles water from its reservoir or catchment basin back to the orifice or fountain jet.

### **Can I operate my fountain if it uses graywater/reclaimed water?**

No. While State law permits up to 400 gallons per day of residential graywater to be used, it is very strict about allowable applications (subsurface irrigation, foundation watering) and does not allow graywater to be sprayed in the air. Reclaimed water supplied by Austin Water is not the same as graywater. Reclaimed water is highly treated and may be used in a fountain; however, we are unaware of any current Austin Water reclaimed customers that operate fountains using reclaimed water.

### **Can I operate my non-recirculating fountain if I fill it with bottled water?**

Yes, bottled water is not regulated by the Water Conservation Code

### **I am concerned about my fountain being a breeding place for mosquitoes.**

Since mosquitos are a concern, you might consider adding "mosquito dunks" to the water. Mosquito Dunks are a bacterial larvicide, which is a non-toxic bacterium that kills mosquito larvae. It's safe for plants and it won't harm pets or people. You can find the product at most garden supply stores.

**I have a water feature in my garden. Can I operate it?**

Yes, as long as it is recirculating and does not have an aerial emission or fall of greater than four (4) inches. Any fountain should follow the same guidelines and restrictions.

**I have a small fountain inside my house (on my patio). Does the ordinance apply?**

Stage 2 addresses ornamental fountains with an aerial emission or fall greater than four (4) inches. Small tabletop fountains that could be used indoors or outdoors may continue to operate.

**I have a waterfall in my pool. May I operate it?**

Swimming pool waterfall features are considered “fountains” under the Water Conservation Code, and as such, must adhere to the same restrictions as all other fountains. However, if it serves a non-ornamental (i.e., recreational) purpose, then it can be operated while people are actively using the pool but it must be turned off at other times.

**My non-recirculating fountain supplies water to area wildlife. May I continue operating it?**

No, all operating fountains must recirculate. Though you may not operate it, you may continue adding water with a handheld hose or bucket to provide water to animals or to serve as a birdbath.

**Can I add water to a recirculating fountain or birdbath?**

Yes, provided you do not operate a fountain with an aerial emission or fall of water greater than four (4) inches. Water may be added any time on any day.

**Recreational Water Use: Pools, Ponds, Spas, and Splash Pads****During Stage 2, are pools, splash pads, and spas allowed to operate?**

Yes. Pools, splash pads, and spas may be used, operated, and filled during Stage 2 without restriction.

**Are there restrictions on my kids playing with water?**

Children can use recreational water toys under all stages except Stage 4. The toys should be placed in an area where run off from the property is minimized.

**Patio Misters****What is patio mister?**

A patio mister is a system that pressurizes and aerosolizes water into a fine mist, which is then sprayed into an area to help to reduce ambient temperatures.

**Can a restaurant/café/bar still operate a patio mister?**

Yes. Commercial facilities may operate patio misters between 4 p.m. and midnight.

**I have a patio mister in my backyard. Can I use it?**

Yes. The Water Conservation Code does not restrict home use of patio misters in Stage 2.

**Golf Courses****Do golf courses have to follow the watering schedule?**

Most area golf courses are supplied with reclaimed water or well water, which are exempt from water use restrictions. However, golf courses using potable water supplied by Austin Water must comply with Austin’s Water Conservation Code. Golf fairways may be irrigated between midnight and 5:00 a.m. and/or

between 7:00 p.m. and midnight on their designated outdoor water use day. A person may irrigate a golf course green or tee every other day only if the irrigation of the location is consistent with a noticed exception establishing the schedule for the property submitted on forms required by Austin Water and approved by the director.

## **Building Foundations**

### **I am concerned about foundation cracking. When can I water my foundation?**

Watering the ground around a foundation is allowed on your watering day during the specified times. The sprinklers should be set to water the ground approximately 18 inches from the foundation of your house.

## **Variances**

### **What is a Variance?**

A variance provides an exception from strict adherence to the water use regulations. Variance requests are usually for newly installed landscapes or very large properties. Variance approvals are based on the specific merits of the request and other pertinent factors. Submitting a variance request does not guarantee the applicant that a variance will be granted.

### **What is a special circumstance variance?**

These variances are typically for issues affecting the health, safety, welfare or sanitation of the public, the applicant or the environment.

### **Are athletic fields exempt from following the watering restrictions?**

Yes, athletic fields are typically exempt when irrigation of the field is necessary to protect the health and safety of the players, staff, or officials present for the athletic event. If Stage 4 Regulations were to be implemented, variances for athletic fields may be granted by the Director on a case-by-case basis.

### **Can I get a variance to water on an extra day?**

No. Variances are not allowed for watering on an additional day. Variances are only granted in a few limited situations including properties too large to be watered in a single day, installation of a new xeriscape, or health and safety reasons. You may water areas that need additional irrigation or show signs of stress using a handheld hose or bucket.

### **I have to work on my scheduled watering day-- or I have another type of personal conflict with the schedule, such as religious/spiritual observance, funeral attendance, sports activity, vacation, or trash pickup. Can I water on a different day?**

A variance from the watering schedule that allows homeowners to switch their assigned watering day because of a personal conflict is not available. If you water with a hose-end sprinkler, there are a variety of timers available that may make watering easier. You may also water with a handheld hose or a bucket at any time on any day of the week.

### **Can I get a variance to the lawn watering restrictions for fire protection?**

The code provides an exemption when watering is immediately necessary for firefighting, fire prevention, or fire suppression when an uncontrollable fire is approaching a person or property. The Fire Department has determined that watering your lawn will not have an appreciable effect on the current fire conditions. This is because most of the fires are starting in wild lands or on the roadside or greenbelt areas that are not typically watered. Flying embers from these fires spread the fire to homes. An ember may land in a dry lawn where the grass begins to burn, but unless the grass is several inches tall it should not present a significant fire threat to the house. The Fire Department advises that the most effective measure to



prevent fire from spreading to your home is to clear brush and debris in an area at least 50 feet from your home and keep your roof-top gutters clear from debris.

**Can I get a variance if I am overseeding or changing out the color beds on my property?**

No, variances are not granted for overseeding. However, if you are installing a seasonal color bed over 500 contiguous square feet you may qualify for a Xeriscape Variance. Areas less than 500 square feet should be watered on your watering day or by hand.

**Can I get a variance if I install new turf or landscape vegetation and need to water it more than on my scheduled outdoor watering day?**

The watering of new landscape material is not allowed during Stage 2, unless the new landscape qualifies as a Xeriscape landscape (see below).

**Can I get a new landscape variance if I am only planting xeric vegetation?**

Yes, during Stage 2, Austin Water will offer variances to customers who install a new landscape to replace an existing landscape if the new landscaping is classified as Xeriscape as defined in the Water Conservation Code. In these cases, the plant material at mature growth must provide at a minimum 50% of the new landscape's areal coverage, and be classified as "low water usage" or "very low water usage" on the plant list managed by Austin Water. The variance will allow irrigation in the following manner:

- for the first 10 days following installation, irrigation is permitted daily before 10:00 a.m. and after 7:00 p.m.
- for the 11th through the 40th day following installation, irrigation is permitted twice per week before 10:00 a.m. and after 7:00 p.m.
- if the landscape installation is required in order to obtain a certificate of occupancy for a newly constructed single family home, the applicant shall provide a completed notice of irrigation variance to the director on the form provided by Austin Water at least on full business day before the landscape is installed.

A one-time extension of the approved variance may be granted by the director only upon the submittal by the applicant of a written request which demonstrates a clear need for the extension to establish the new landscaping

**What if I can't water my entire property in one day?**

A Watering Day Variance allows for irrigation to occur on additional days if the irrigation system is not capable of watering the entire property within one watering day. An approved variance allows the property to be divided into sections with each section being watered only once a week. This would include uniquely shaped lots that use hose end sprinkler systems and cannot irrigate each section within the allotted timeframe. Please note that the variance approval process may take several weeks to complete and the property must follow the watering schedule until a variance is approved.

**My elderly parent is handicapped and is unable to water her yard on her designated outdoor water use day due to the schedule of the care provider. Is a variance available for people with disabilities?**

A variance may be granted if a property owner has documentation of a disability or medical hardship that prevents them from strictly following the Water Conservation Code requirements. Medical Hardship or Disability variances are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Customers who have a medical condition that requires them to receive assistance with watering and who do not have an automatic irrigation system can submit a statement attesting to the condition and requesting alternative compliance with the schedule.

**I need to water in fertilizer for my yard. May I get a variance?**

If you are applying a chemical lawn treatment to your own property, it must be applied on your designated watering day. Commercial applications of lawn chemicals are exempt from the watering schedule. If you

use a commercial company to apply lawn treatments, you are encouraged to keep the receipt showing the application day(s) and company name.

**When do variances expire? Can variances be suspended or revoked?**

A variance typically expires once the event for which it was granted ends or on the date listed on the variance approval. Austin Water may suspend or revoke a variance if any of the following occur:

- the terms of the variance are violated
- the submitted application contained false, misleading, incomplete, or inaccurate information
- conditions require the director to declare an emergency recall of variances